

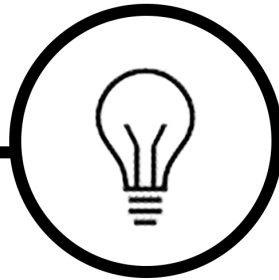
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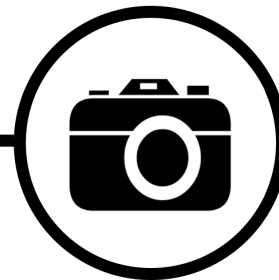


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The Disciple-Maker's Life

Note: This article is adapted from a sermon preached on September 3, 2017.

Last March I added a new member to my family. Her name is Alexa, and she works for Amazon. She lives on our kitchen counter, and I talk to her everyday—usually by asking her to stream our favorite Pandora radio station. She has been known to play games with the kids. I'm at a season in life when the house is pretty crowded and busy and loud. None of us pay much attention to Alexa. Thankfully, she really doesn't ask for anything.

But one day, when the kids leave and the house gets quieter, who knows what else Alexa will be able to do? This much I do know: her presence on my counter, much like Siri's presence in our pocket, represents a turning point in human history. To borrow a subtitle from the Terminator series: it's the rise of the machines. Our dependence on computers is growing at a staggering speed.

RISE OF THE MACHINES

Researchers at MIT are trying to build an "automated psychotherapist." Why are they doing this? They are convinced we all need professional therapy, but most of us can't afford it. Computer psychiatrists could make mental health conversations available at low cost to everyone. Or so they say.¹

A few years ago, a middle-school principal in upstate New York asked a psychologist to visit her campus. The principal had a problem. It appeared the kids no longer interacted normally. "Students don't seem to be making friendships as before," the principal insisted, "they make acquaintances, but their connections seem superficial."² The problem, noted Shelly Turkle, author of *Reclaiming Conversation*, is the rise of the machines. Turkle lamented the way technology promises what it can never actually deliver: "Computers offer the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship and as the programs got really good, the illusion of friendship without the demands of intimacy."³

DO WE REALLY KNOW ONE ANOTHER?

This brings us to the church. Congregations have always been hubs of friendship and intimacy. Just read the book of Acts! But friendship and intimacy have fallen on hard

times. What that principal noticed in her middle-school is similar to criticisms made about churches today. Sure, we come and gather, but do we really *know* one another? And if we know each other, do we *care*?

It would be naïve to deny technology affects each of us. It creates a gulf, a divide between us. It started long before the iPhone. From the air conditioner that got us off the front porch, to the television that glued us to the couch, technology that promised to make the world smaller has managed to make the world a lonelier, less personal place to live.

HEART OF THE CHURCH'S MISSION

Life is supposed to be intensely personal. At the heart of the church's mission is a responsibility we can't outsource to Silicon Valley: it's the personal command to make disciples found in Matthew 28:19–20:

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Many take the Great Commission to be a missionary text—and it certainly is! Every Christian must evangelize—share the gospel. We do this so those who have never repented and believed can hear, turn to Christ, and be saved.

But this passage is about more than evangelism; it's about discipling or disciple-making. It's also about taking someone who is *already* a Christian and personally, regularly, and deliberately helping him or her to grow in Christlikeness. That's discipling.

A couple passages on this subject deserve our attention. Consider John 8:31, "So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, 'If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples.'" Disciples, said Jesus, are believers—believers in him. Not only that, disciples abide in his Word—the Bible. To help someone grow in Christlikeness requires helping them abide in God's Word. Those who abide come to understand, apply, and live out the truth of Scripture. This makes sense of the Great Commission where we are told to *teach* disciples to observe everything Jesus commanded. Discipling includes teaching Christians to abide.

Colossians 2:28 is another important text: "Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with

all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.” Paul didn’t just devote his life to evangelism, he committed himself to helping believers mature in Christ—this was his aim. It should be our aim too because it is clearly at the heart of the church’s mission.

Have you ever wondered what the church is here for? Why do we gather? It’s not to entertain. It’s not the church’s job to make people comfortable. We aren’t even here simply to teach or instruct or inspire—though I hope all those things happen when we meet together. We are here to make disciples, to prod one another on to spiritual maturity, to help each other grow in Christlikeness.

HOW ARE WE DOING?

A few years ago the Barna Group produced a survey on the state of discipleship in the church today. They concluded, sadly, that only 1 in 5 Christians are involved in discipleship.⁵ It’s not that churches don’t have Sunday schools and small groups, Bible studies and service projects. These programs can be very good. But the researchers discovered Christians can be in churches with the best programs and not actually experience discipling.

Colin Marshall and Tony Payne describe this problem beautifully in their book, *The Trellis and the Vine*. The “trellis” of the church is made up of structures and programs. The “vine” of the church is the disciple-making—the process of actually getting involved in individual lives. The problem, argue Marshall and Payne, is churches tend to be better at trellis-work than vine-work. Trellis-work is hugely important. But it’s not enough. Yet, they argue, many churches devote most of their resources to building the scaffolding of the church. Why is this? They say we’re the problem:

Perhaps it’s because trellis work is easier and less personally threatening. Vine work is personal and requires much prayer. It requires us to depend on God, and to open our mouths and speak God’s word in some way to another person. By nature (by sinful nature, that is) we shy away from this. What would you rather do: go to a church working bee and sweep up some leaves, or share the gospel with your neighbor over the back fence? Which is easier: to have a business meeting about the state of the carpet, or to have a difficult personal meeting where you need to rebuke a friend about his sinful behavior?⁵

It’s tempting for church staff to devote time to ensuring everyone has a job. We leave the vine work to the “professionals”—the pastors and staff. But because we can never hire enough staff or even raise up enough leaders to personally, regularly, and deliberately help others grow in Christlikeness, the vast majority of Christians raise their hands and say they aren’t being disciplined by anyone in any meaningful way. This is sad.

DISCIPLING IS INTIMIDATING

Most Christians want to be cared for—we want to be disciplined. But it’s hard to imagine God using *us* to disciple another person. The prospect of being a disciple-maker can be overwhelming.

It reminds me of the moment my wife, Deana, and I left Norton Hospital in downtown Louisville, Kentucky, with our newborn girl. I drove up to the curb to pick up mom and baby. As the nurse helped Deana into the front seat, I carefully buckled Rachel into the backseat. We drove home slowly, *very* slowly. And as we drove away, I just kept asking myself, “Couldn’t the nurse come live with us for a few days? It seems risky to leave the baby with us, alone.” I felt unprepared and ill-equipped to be a dad.

Isn’t this how many of us feel about disciple-making? A lot of people are intimidated at the thought of being used by God to help another believer grow in Christlikeness. When you add to this our pride, our fear of being vulnerable, and our busy schedules, the prospect of actually committing ourselves to discipling seems unlikely indeed.

WHAT EVERY DISCIPLE-MAKER NEEDS

If you are intimidated at the thought of discipling, I hope you’ll read on. I want to reassure you that if you are a Christian, you can do this. God can use you to personally, regularly, and deliberately help another believer grow in Christlikeness. In fact, we need just three things: a genuine faith, a genuine holiness, and a genuine love.

A Genuine Faith

This may sound simple, but in order to be a disciple-maker you need to be a Christian. Your faith must be in Christ. He has to be your life. Christ must be everything to you. Those whose truly have faith in Christ are saved from their sin and spared from the wrath of God that sin deserves. A disciple-maker is first forgiven and washed clean. Your thoughts and affections, your head and your heart are now focused on Jesus Christ. His person (who Christ is) and his work (what he did) have to be more

important to you than anything else. In short, your faith must be in Christ alone.

John stresses the necessity of faith in Christ. It's all over the letter. He wrote 1 John so we, the readers, might have eternal life. This is the heart of John's message. We "proclaim to you the eternal life" (1 John 1:2). And this "eternal life" is none other than Christ. He is the one seen and touched and heard by John and the other apostles: "That which we have seen and heard, we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1:3)

But how do we get this eternal life? We know it's good, but how does it become ours? John is very clear your faith has to be in Christ. "No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father" (2:23–24). Here, again, is "abiding" language. When the Word of God is truly in you, you are truly in God the Father and the Son. This is another way of saying your faith is in Christ. This is why John says you can't deny Christ and still have the Father.

John gets more specific a few verses later when he shares the heart of the gospel message. "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us" (3:16). This is the crux of the Good News. Our faith is to be in Christ who gave himself up for us. God's love for us outshines our love for him! "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (4:10). Propitiation is a fancy word. But it's important. It tells us what happened when Christ died. It means Jesus took in his body the wrath of God we deserved. He took the Father's wrath upon himself so we wouldn't have to.

Someone might still ask, "How is this possible?" In other words, how could anyone die the death we deserved to die? John addresses that question at the very end of his letter when he makes it clear just who Jesus is: "He is the true God and eternal life" (5:20). Jesus wasn't just a good rabbi, a sage, or even simply a humble carpenter. The claim of Christianity is so much bigger. He can do everything the Bible says he does because Jesus is God. To put faith in Christ is to believe the Son of God gave up his very life that you might have eternal life—that you might have Christ.

To be a disciple-maker, you have to be a Christian. You have to have genuine faith. Your faith can't be in yourself, in your parents, in science and technology, or in the goodness of humanity. Your faith has to be in the perfect life, atoning death, and powerful resurrection of Jesus Christ. Your faith has to be in Christ. You have to trust him. To be a disciple-maker you must first be a disciple. You need genuine faith.

A Genuine Holiness

Much of 1 John is dedicated to who Jesus is and what he has done. But that's not all 1 John is about. He also helps us to see what faith in Christ looks like. In fact, John is clear the faith we have in Christ can never be separated from the life we live for Christ. The two go hand-in-hand. We are declared righteous by faith alone, but this faith is never alone. It is always accompanied by good works. A true Christian is marked by a genuine holiness. John liked to use the metaphor of walking, "whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked" (2:6).

Having a Christ-like walk is important because it is evidence you truly know Christ. It's also crucially important when you think about disciple-making. Jesus explained to his disciples that "everyone when he is full trained will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40). He was making the point that the blind can't lead the blind. To be a true leader it's not enough to know, intellectually, where to go, you've got to actually be walking there. So it is with discipling. A holy life is important because, whether you like it or not, those you disciple will start looking like you.

Of course the goal of disciple-making is helping others look like Jesus. But as we go about this process, something happens. The one being disciplined comes to look a little like the human instrument God uses in the process. The disciple when "fully trained," said Jesus, becomes "like his teacher." It just happens. It's normal. It's natural. It's unavoidable. This is why, in 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul writes, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." Paul affirms that in the disciple-making process, people will tend to look like him, but he urges caution. He is not trying to make little Pauls—Paulians. That's not the goal. The goal is to make little Christs—Christians.

Augustine understood this. He wrote a book for Bible teachers centuries ago. It's called, *On Christian Doctrine*. Augustine pointed to the importance of a teacher's walk: "The life of the speaker has greater weight in determining whether he is obediently heard than any grandness of

eloquence.”⁶ Augustine understood Luke 6:40. We tend to become like the ones we respect. We tend to become like our teachers. Therefore, we must be careful. People aren’t just looking for sound words; they are looking for a compelling and attractive life.

I certainly want my words to be true. But I also want my life to be attractive. I don’t want my kids growing up simply thinking Dad preached good sermons. I want them to be able to say he modeled a life worth living.

Every congregation needs people with a genuine walk. We need several models we can follow. In that sense, we need many teachers, many disciple-makers. It would be sad if everyone looked like the pastor. We don’t need more Aarons! We need moms and dads, grandmothers and grandfathers, plumbers and doctors, introverts and extroverts—all demonstrating a genuine gospel walk.

How is your walk? John provides some words that deserve serious meditation: “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world” (1 John 2:15–16). Do you love God more than you love the world? Would you be happy for a younger brother or sister in Christ to imitate how you work and how you play, how you talk and how you pray?

Brothers and sisters, a genuine walk is not easy, but it’s beautiful. Here’s a simple assignment: find someone who knows you well and ask him or her this question: “How does my Christian walk need to improve?” A disciple-maker has a genuine walk.

A Genuine Love

Love is essential for disciple-making. God calls us to profoundly love our brothers and sisters in Christ. This is not a suggestion; it’s a command. The absence of this love is not acceptable. If you don’t have this love, John says, you aren’t a Christian. And if this love is not deep and growing, you are suited to make disciples. Consider some of the several passages that speak to the importance of love in the Christian life.

- ✦ “Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness” (2:10–11). There is no in-between. All those with a genuine walk have a genuine love for their

brothers and sisters. Either that, or you are blind—separated from Christ.

- ✦ “For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another” (3:11). John doesn’t separate the gospel message of salvation from sin from the gospel call to love others as Christ loved you.
- ✦ “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death” (3:14). Failing to love your brother is simply not a Christian option.
- ✦ “And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us” (3:23). Loving each other is so important it can’t be separated from faith. Love is essential.
- ✦ “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen” (4:20). If you say you love God—if you say you believe the gospel—but you don’t profoundly, practically, and personally love God’s people, then you are nothing more than a hypocrite. You’re no better than the Pharisee who thanked God he wasn’t as bad as all the sinners around him. You’re no better than the older brother who hated his father for showing grace to the younger brother. You can have all the theological knowledge in the world, but if you don’t actually love the brother or sister for whom Christ died, then your Christianity is fake; it’s all show and no substance.

Charles Bridges wrote for pastors. But his words apply to every Christian. We have to learn to live for each other. “It may be generally remarked, that, unless our work exhibit the self-denying character of the cross of Christ, it is the Christian Ministry in the letter only, not in the Spirit; it is not the work, that God has engaged to bless.”⁷ In other words, if we are all about trellis-work—staffing ministries, organizing programs, filling classrooms—but we won’t lay down our lives for each other out of love, what good is any of it, and what reason do we have to think God will bless it?

NOW TO THE WORK

John describes a Christian as someone with a genuine faith, a genuine holiness, and a genuine love. There will be times when our faith is weak, our holiness is dull, and our love is shallow. No one is perfect. This is why we need Christ. But, by God’s grace, a weak faith is still faith! You can truly struggle and still be a Christian.

If you can see faith and holiness and love in your life, you have everything you need to begin investing in another believer. You can help them personally, regularly, and deliberately grow in Christlikeness. Christian, that's what I'm asking you to do. It won't be easy, but it's great. It's a call to what Paul David Tripp described as "biblical personal ministry." It's

a simple call to every one of God's children to be part of what God is doing in the lives of others. It is living in humble, honest, redemptive community with others, *loving* as Christ loved, and going beyond the casual to really *know* people. It is loving others enough to *speak* the truth to them, helping them to see themselves in the mirror of God's Word. And it is standing with others, helping them to *do* what God has called them to do. It is basically just a call to biblical friendship! It is almost embarrassingly simple: *Love* people. *Know* them. *Speak* truth into their lives. Help them to *do* what God has called them to do.⁸

Would you commit yourself to this kind of work?

Alexa and Siri will never be my friend. They can't know me. They won't ever be able to disciple me. My church family can. You can. All you need is genuine faith, genuine holiness, and genuine love. Do you want to personally, regularly, and deliberately help other believers grow in Christlikeness? If you have that desire, that's a good place to start.

~Aaron Menikoff

¹ Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015), 347.

² *Ibid.*, 5.

³ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴ *The State of Discipleship: A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with The Navigators* (2015).

⁵ Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift That Changes Everything* (Kingsford, Australia: Matthias Media, 2009), 9.

⁶ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 164.

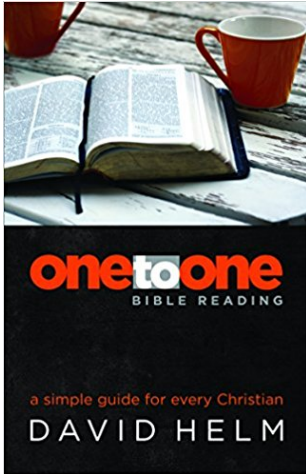
⁷ Charles Bridges, *The Christian Ministry*, 127.

⁸ Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, 274–75.

One to One Bible Reading

Written by David Helm

Bookstall Price \$9



“I want to grow up in Christ and I want to find a woman who will help me do that.” Those were the words a sister in Christ said to me casually while at dinner one night. It is a simple but serious desire, a desire all Christians should have. But many of us don’t know where to begin to help someone mature in Christ. Or even worse, we think we are not able to point others to Christ. What better way is there to point someone to Jesus Christ, the word made flesh, then to point them to the Word, the Bible?

One to One Bible Reading by David Helm is a great resource for Christians to use in any discipleship relationship to point each another to Christ. This past year, Mount Vernon has focused on the importance of personal discipleship relationships—intentional relationships where Christ is the focus and knowing him better is the goal of the meeting. In his book, Helm lays out different frameworks and ideas to help direct participants in having productive, meaningful time with one another while reading the Bible together. As Helm explains, these one-to-one meetings are “an opportunity simply to feed from God’s word together.”

One to One Bible Reading teaches how to read the Bible with another person. First, it clearly walks the reader through the practical aspects of a reading one-to-one relationship, from setting it up, explaining what a typical meeting will look like, and suggesting reading plans to use with non-Christians, new Christians, or mature Christians. Secondly, it lays out two simple methods to use when reading the Bible: the Swedish method and the COMA method. In addition to explaining the two methods, Helm also explains how to approach reading different types of biblical genres.

Whether you are a seasoned student or an inexperienced explorer of the Bible, this book will give you helpful tools to use when reading the Bible on your own and especially when reading it with another person. This is a great book to use as a resource to build your confidence in understanding the Bible through personal devotions, and especially in discipling others.

– RECOMMENDED BY MEGAN WELTSCHIEFF

Excerpts From the Book

1

“Reading one-to-one is a variation on that most central Christian activity--reading the Bible—but done in the context of reading with someone.”

–Why read one-to-one?, p. 11

2

“It is not a teaching session (requiring detailed preparation and study), but an opportunity simply to feed from God’s word together.”

–Preparation, p. 34

3

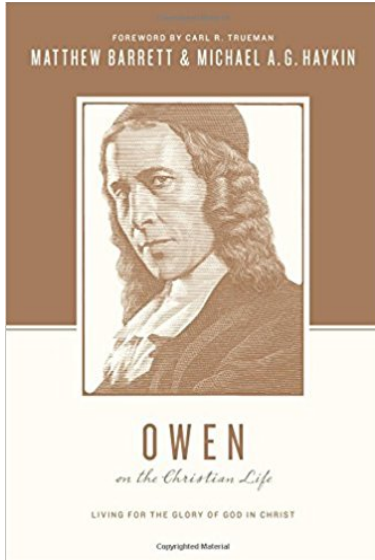
“God chose to communicate his divine truth to us in human language, and his words are written in a book that uses the same tools and conventions of language as any other book.”

–Frameworks and ideas, p. 41

Owen on the Christian Life: Living for the Glory of God in Christ

Written by Matthew Barrett & Michael A.G. Haykin

Bookstall Price \$17



Owen on the Christian Life is a great introduction into the intimidating world of the English Puritans. In this book, Matthew Barrett and Michael A.G. Haykin provide a wonderful overview of the life of John Owen, the fundamental tenants of his theology, and the opposition he faced as an early reformer in 17th century England. John Owen was one of the most prolific Puritan writers, not only for the quantity of work he produced, but the quality of his writings. As such, it should be expected that Barrett and Haykin are providing high-level overviews of many of the beliefs Owen held so dear.

The first two chapters give the reader a biographical summary of Owen’s life and an overview of some of the opposition he faced. The historical context of Owen’s life helps the reader establish a context for the chapters on doctrine. Owen was a staunch defender of the authority of Scripture. Barrett and Haykin highlight Owen’s struggle with the Quakers on this issue and draw interesting parallels to the conflict surrounding the authority of Scripture in the church today.

The bulk of the book focuses on Owen’s rich theology. Chapter 4, “Beholding the Glory of Christ,” was a core tenant of Owen’s theology as it focuses on “the first priority of the Christian life giving honor, glory, and praise to the Son for who he is and what he has done.” After reading Owen’s view, I am convicted that we cannot separate our love of Christ from the Christian life as all our “spiritual comforts” depend on our love for and obedience to the Lord Jesus.

Barrett and Haykin conclude with Owen’s impact and legacy on other Puritans and future generations. In 1863, nearly 200 years after Owens death, Charles Spurgeon encouraged his congregation to “renounce as much as you will all light literature, but study as much as possible sound theological works, especially the Puritanic writers.” We would do well to heed this call as well. If you are so inclined, I would encourage you to start with *Owen on the Christian Life: Living for the Glory of God in Christ*.

– RECOMMENDED BY GARRY HILL

Excerpts From the Book

1

“The first priority in the Christian life is giving honor, glory and praise to the Son for who he is and what he has done. In other words, Christ is the object of our worship owing to his ‘divine nature’ and ‘infinite excellencies.’”

–Beholding the Glory of Christ, p. 103-104

2

“The one sure word we know to the from the Holy Spirit is the sixty-six books of the Bible. Since that is the case, all that claims to be from God the Holy Spirit today must be tested and validated by those books.”

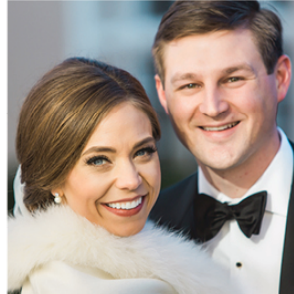
–Living by the Scriptures, p. 52

3

“Obedience, therefore, is crucial in our communion. While obedience in no way grounds or conditions our union, regeneration, or justification, it does play a significant role in our sanctification, and the sweetness of our communion with God can be greatly affected by it.”

–Communing with the Trinity, p. 55-56

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